Fiction Travel

# THE TIMES' STORY PAGE

Adventure Romance

# The SCARLET PLAGUE

By JACK LONDON



CHAPTER IV.

—7—

Beginning of Life Anew.

"But I must go on with my story. I traveled through a deserted land. As the time went by I began to yearn more and more for human beings. But I never found one, and I grew lonelier and lonelier. I crossed Livermore valley and the mountains between it and the great valley of the San Joaquin. You have never seen that valley, but it is very large and it is the home of the wild horse. There are great droves there, thousands and tens of thousands. I revisited it thirty years after, so I know. You think there are lots of wild horses down here in the coast valleys, but they are as nothing compared with those of the San Joaquin. Strange to say, the cows, when they went wild, went back into the lower mountains. Evidently they were better able to protect themselves there.

"In the country districts the ghouls and prowlers had been less in evidence, for I found many villages and towns untouched by fire. But they were filled by the pestilential dead, and I passed by without exploring them. It was near Lathrop that, out of my loneliness, I picked up a pair of collie dogs that were so newly free that they were urgently willing to return to their allegiance to man. These collies accompanied me for many years, and the strains of them are in these very dogs there that you boys have today. But in sixty years the collie strain has worked out. Those brutes are more like domesticated wolves than anything else."

Hare-Lip rose to his feet, glanced to see that the goats were safe, and looked at the sun's position in the afternoon sky, advertising impatience at the prolixity of the old man's tale. Urged to hurry by Edwin, Ganser went on:

"There is little more to tell. With my two dogs and my pony, and riding a horse I had managed to capture, I crossed the San Joaquin and went on to a wonderful valley in the Sierras called Yosemite. In the great hotel there I found a prodigious supply of tinned provisions. The pasture was abundant, as was the game, and the river that ran through the valley was full of trout. I remained there three years in an utter loneliness that none but a man who has once been highly civilized can understand. Then I could stand it no more. I felt that I was going crazy. Like the dog, I was a social animal and needed my kind. I reasoned that since I had survived the plague, there was a possibility that others had survived. Also, I reasoned that after three years the plague germs must all be gone and the land be clean again.

"With my horse and dogs and pony, I set out. Again I crossed the San Joaquin valley, the mountains beyond, and came down into Livermore valley. The change in those three years was amazing. All the land had been splendidly tilled, and now I could scarcely recognize it, such was the sea of rank vegetation that had overrun the agricultural handiwork of man. You see, the wheat, the vegetables, and orchard trees had always been cared for and nursed by man, so that they were soft and tender. The weeds and wild bushes and such things, on the contrary, had always been fought by man, so that they were tough and resistant. As a result, when the hand of man was removed the wild vegetation smothered and destroyed practically all the domesticated vegetation. The coyotes were greatly increased, and it was at this time that I first encountered wolves, straying in twos and threes and small packs, down from the wild regions where they had always persisted.

"It was at Lake Temescal, not far from the one-time city of Oakland, that I came upon the first live human being. Oh, my grandsons, how can I describe to you my emotions, when, astride my horse and dropping down the hillside to the lake, I saw the smoke of a campfire rising through the trees. Almost did my heart stop beating. I felt that I was going crazy. Then I heard the cry of a babe—a human babe. And dogs barked and my dogs answered. I did not know but that I was the one human alive in the whole world. It could not be true that there were others—smoke, and the cry of a babe.

"Emerging on the lake, there, before my eyes, not a hundred yards away, I saw a man, a large man. He was standing on an outjutting rock and fishing. I was overcome. I stopped my horse. I tried to call out, but could not. I waved my hand. It seemed to me that the man looked at me, but he did not appear to wave. Then I laid my hand on my arms there in the saddle. I was afraid to look again, for I knew it was an hallucination, and I knew that if I looked the man would be gone. And so precious was the hallucination that I wanted it to persist yet a little while. I knew, too, that as long as I did not look it would persist.

"Thus I remained, until I heard my dogs snarling, and man's voice. What do you think the voice said? I will tell you. It said: "Where in hell did you come from?"

"Those were the words, the exact words. That was what your grandfather said to me, Hare-Lip, when he greeted me there on the shore of Lake Temescal fifty-seven years ago. And they were the most ineffable words I have ever heard. I opened my eyes, and there he stood before me, a large, dark, hairy man, heavy jawed, slant browed, fierce eyed. How I got off my horse I do not know. But it seemed that the next I knew I was clasping his hand with both of mine and crying. I would have embraced him, but he was ever a narrow-minded, suspicious man, and he drew away from me. Yet did I cling to his hand and cry."

Granser's voice faltered and broke at the recollection, and the weak tears streamed down his cheeks while the boys looked on and giggled.

"Yet did I cry," he continued, "and desire to embrace him, though the Chauffeur was a brute, a perfect brute—the most abhorrent man I have ever known. His name was . . . strange, how I have forgotten his name. Everybody called him Chauffeur—it was the name of his occupation, and it stuck. That is how, to this day, the tribe he founded is called the Chauffeur tribe.

"He was a violent, unjust man. Why the plague spared him I can never understand. It would seem, in spite of our old metaphysical notions about absolute justice, that there is no justice in the universe. Why did he live?—an iniquitous, moral monster, a blot on the face of nature, a cruel, relentless, bestial cheat as well. All he could talk about was motor cars, machinery, gasoline, and garage—and especially with huge delight, of his mean pilferings and sordid swindlings of the persons who had employed him in the days before the coming of the plague. And yet he was spared, while hundreds of millions, yea, billions, of better men were destroyed.

"I went on with him to his camp, and there I saw her, Vesta, the one woman. It was glorious and . . . pitiful. There she was, Vesta Van Warden, the young wife of John Van Warden, clad in rags, with marred and scarred and toil-calloused hands, bending over the campfire and doing scullion work—she, Vesta, who had been born to the purple of the greatest baronage of wealth the world had ever known. John Van Warden, her husband, worth one billion eight hundred millions, and president of the Board of Industrial Magnates, had been the ruler of America. Also, sitting on the Industrial Board of Control, he had been one of the seven men who ruled the world. And she herself had come of equally noble stock. Her father, Philip Saxon, had been President of the Board of Industrial Magnates up to the time of his death. This office was in process of becoming hereditary, and had Philip Saxon had a son that son would have succeeded him. But his only child was Vesta, the perfect flower of generations of the highest culture this planet has ever produced. It was not until the engagement between Vesta and Van Warden took place that Saxon indicated the latter as his successor. It was, I am sure, a political marriage. I have reason to believe that Vesta never really loved her husband in the mad, passionate way of which the poets used to sing. It was more like the marriages that obtained among crowned heads before they were displaced by the Magnates.

"And there she was, boiling fish chowder in a soot-covered pot, her glorious eyes inflamed by the acrid smoke of the open fire. Here was a sad story. She was the one survivor in a million, as I had been, as the Chauffeur had been. On a crowning eminence of the Alameda Hills, overlooking San Francisco Bay, Van Warden had built a vast summer palace. It was surrounded by a park of a thousand acres. When the plague broke out, Van Warden sent her there. Armed guards patrolled the boundaries of the park, and nothing entered in the way of provisions or even mail matter that was not first fumigated. And yet did the plague enter, killing the guards at their posts, the servants at their tasks, sweeping away the whole army of retainers—or, at least, all them who did not flee to die elsewhere. So it was that Vesta found herself the sole living person in the palace that had become a charnel house.

"Now, the Chauffeur had been one of the servants that ran away. Returning, two months afterward, he discovered Vesta in a little summer pavilion where there had been no deaths and where she had established herself. He was a brute. She was afraid, and she ran away and hid among the trees. That night, on foot, she fled into the mountains—she, whose tender feet and delicate body had never known the bruise of stones nor the scratch of briers. He followed, and that night he caught her. He struck her. Do you understand? He beat her with those terrible fists of his and made her his slave. It was she who had to gather the firewood, build the fires, cook and do all the degrading camp labor—she, who had never performed a menial act in her life. These things he compelled her to do, while he, a proper savage, elected to lie around camp and look on. He did nothing, absolutely nothing, except on occasion to hunt meat or catch fish."

"Good for Chauffeur," Hare-Lip commented in an understone to the other boys. "I remember him before he died. He was a corker. But he did things, and he made things go. You know, dad married his daughter, an' you ought to see the way he knocked the spots outa dad. The Chauffeur was a son of a gun. He made us kids stand around. Even when he was croakin' he reached out for me once an' laid my head open with that long stick he kept always beside him."

Hare-Lip rubbed his bullet head reminiscently, and the boys returned to the old man, who was maundering ecstatically about Vesta, the squaw of the founder of the Chauffeur tribe.

"And so I say to you that you can-

With My Horse and Dogs and Pony I Set Out.

not understand the awfulness of the situation. The Chauffeur was a servant, understand, a servant. And he cringed, with bowed head, to such as she. She was a lord of life, both by birth and by marriage. The destinies of millions such as he she carried in the hollow of her pink-white hand. And, in the days before the plague, the slightest contact with such as he would have been pollution. Oh, I have seen it. Once, I remember, there was a Mrs. Goldwin, wife of one of the great magnates. It was on a landing stage, just as she was embarking in her private dirigible, that she dropped her parasol. A servant picked it up and made the mistake of handing it to her—to her, one of the greatest royal ladies of the land! She shrank back, as though he were a leper, and indicated her secretary to receive it. Also, she ordered her secretary to ascertain the creature's name and to see that he was immediately discharged from service. And such a woman was Vesta Van Warden. And her the Chauffeur beat and made his slave.

"—Bill—that was it; Bill, the Chauffeur. That was his name. He was a wretched, primitive man, wholly devoid of the finer instincts and chivalrous promptings of a cultured soul. No, there is no absolute justice, for to him fell that wonder of womanhood, Vesta Van Warden. The grievousness of this you will never understand, my grandsons; for you are yourselves primitive little savages, unaware of aught else but savagery. Why should Vesta not have been mine? I was a man of culture and refinement, a professor in a great university. Even so, in the time before the plague, such was her exalted position, she would not have deigned to know that I existed. Mark, then, the abysmal degradation to which she fell at the hands of the Chauffeur. Nothing less than the destruction of all mankind had made it possible that I should know her, look in her eyes, converse with her, touch her hand—aye, and love her and know that her feelings toward me were very kindly. I have reason to believe that she, even she, would have loved me, there being no other man in the world except the Chauffeur. Why, when it destroyed eight billions of souls, did not the plague destroy just one more man, and that man the Chauffeur?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## ENGLISH VILLAGE A MODEL

About as Sinless as Is Likely to Be Found in This Wicked Old Abode of Men.

A sinless village has been found in England. It is Blackwell, a snug little colliery town in the Derbyshire hills, where the solitary policeman enjoys a perpetual holiday. The last incumbent left from sheer boredom. The manager of the collieries is a born leader of men, and this, combined with the fact that he can dimiss all evil-doers at will, practically the whole population being employed at the colliery, is the secret of his power. At the model clubhouse the main army of the villagers can be seen around the model bar arranged by the manager, who does not object to drink in moderation. He selects the brands of whisky and beer for the consumption of his flock. Over the bar are notices requesting patrons not to swear or gamble. There is a ballroom, and here the youth of Blackwell trip decorous measures, for Blackwell has no use for the tango or other modern dances, or, for that matter, for modern dress. There is also in the building two well-equipped baths, so that cleanliness ranks among the villagers' many virtues. Blackwell has also excellent cricket and football grounds. In the cricket building is a battered straw hat, the relic from Blackwell's one lapse from grace. It was the only hat out of fifteen that returned when a party of holiday-makers left Blackwell to spend a day in London.

### Politeness In Athens.

A long time ago, in Athens, the Spartan boys were guests of Athenian boys at the theater. They were sitting in the front row because they were the guests of honor.

Just before the play began an old man came into the crowded theater, and made his way down to the front. He stopped by the seats of the Athenian boys, and they commenced to make fun of him. He turned sadly away.

As he was about to go away the Spartan boys all rose and motioned for the old man to come and sit with them. At first the Athenian boys were ashamed; then they began to cheer.

All the people were attracted by this and looked to see the cause of it. When the cheering was over, the old man stood up and said:

"Athenian boys know what is right, but the Spartan boys do what is right."

### Thoughts in Autumn Fields.

Perhaps the herb everlasting, the fragrant immortelle of our autumn fields, has the most suggestive odor to me of all those that set me dreaming. I can hardly describe the strange thoughts and emotions which come to me as I inhale the aroma of its pale, dry, rustling flowers. A something it has of sepulchral spicery, as if it had been brought from the core of some great pyramid, where it had lain on the breast of a mummied Pharaoh. Something, too, of immortality in the sad, faint sweetness lingering so long in its lifeless petals. Yet this does not tell why it fills my eyes with tears and carries me in blissful thought to the banks of Asphodel that border the River of Life.—Oliver Wendell Holmes.

### Senator Sumner's Literalness.

Of Senator Sumner's literalness some amusing anecdotes have been told. At an official ball in Washington he remarked to a young lady: "We are fortunate in having these places; we shall see the first entrance of the new English and French ministers into Washington society." The young girl replied: "I am glad to hear it, I like to see lions break the ice." Sumner was silent for a few minutes, but presently said: "Miss ———, in the country where lions live there is no ice."—Christian Register.

### As Society Sees It.

"I thought you were going to move into a more expensive apartment?" "The landlord saved us the trouble," replied Mrs. Flimgilt. "He raised the rent of the one we have been occupying."—Washington Star.



### Ignorance Was Bliss.

A raid had been made on a negro gambling house and a dozen inmates arrested. In police court the next morning each of the accused was heard in turn. The last in the row was a large, scared-looking negro.

"Well," asked the judge, "what do you know about this case?"

"Who? Me?" asked the negro.

"Yes, you."

"Well, I just tell yo'. All I knows about dis case is dat I was dar!"—Green Bag.

### Her Preference.

Young Mawks had decided to enlist and go to war, and his wife was objecting.

"But, darling," he argued, "even if I were killed, just think how fine it would be to be the widow of a hero."

"Oh, no, Wilfred," pleaded the young wife earnestly, her mind reverting to a familiar proverb; "I would rather be the wife of a live jackass than a dead lion."—Judge.

### A Natural Fear.

Old Hound—Come, come! What are you shivering about?

The Pup—Why, I just heard the master say he'd have to put me through the mill.

Old Hound—Yes; he's going to train you for the hunting.

The Pup—Oh! I thought he meant the sausage mill.—Pittsburgh Dispatch.

### Reminiscence.

"I can remember when we could get an idea of how an election was going by taking a straw vote."

"We never depend on straw votes out our way. The only chance of learning which way the election was going was to discover which side had the most two-dollar bills."

### Showing It.

"They tell me that prosecuting attorney is very bold in his conduct of cases."

"So they say. He must have the courage of his convictions."

### Wears Many Crowns.

He—She's a thoroughly queenly woman.

She—Yes; even her teeth have gold crowns.—Town Topics.

## MUCH PITY WASTED

Martyrdom for One May Be Pleasure for Another.

The Open Air Man Pities the Man With the Indoor Job—Then There Is the Case of Henrietta.

There is an awful lot of pity wasted in the world. Take, for example, Henrietta. Henrietta's family and friends are always pitying her because she married that "hopelessly uninteresting" or "everlastingly disagreeable" man, while Henrietta is laughing in her sleeve because her sympathizers have never seen the real side of her Henry, and she feels positively much set up because she knows he is more interesting and infinitely nicer than folks suppose him to be. Personally, the writer never cared for this negative charm in men, but there are numerous women who feel differently. They consider that a man apathetic, or even disagreeable, to others can be stirred out of his habitual mood when associated with them. Hence sympathy for Henrietta is wasted.

The open air man pities the man with the indoor job. He rejoices in being out among his fellow men. Confinement or detail work would kill him, whereas the indoor man feels concerning the outdoor one that the latter leads a dog's life—always on the go—always having to be cheerful, no matter if the water pipes have frozen or the baby has the croup.

Our little barks of life may seem to be carried along by currents stronger than the individual will, yet really the individual is consciously, or unconsciously, at the helm controlling every portion of the steering gear and directing the craft toward the port of his desires. One might think we put up with our associates as we put up with our features, but actually we are constantly drawing the congenial companion to us and eliminating the acquaintances we care nothing about.

It may be that one "wants but little here below, nor wants that little long," but certainly people do want the queerest things. Imagine how a man who rejoices in a pretty wife and cozy home must pity an explorer like Peary and what Gelett Burgess calls the latter's unconquerable taste for voluntary and unnecessary suffering. According to Gelett, Mrs. Peary's peculiar self-chosen line of hardships included "twenty years of half freezing to death, pulling sledges, eating shoes and candles, sleeping in a bearskin bag." And then, as Gelett pathetically concludes, "when he had found the north pole he didn't know what to do with it."

Who can understand the lure of the undertaking business? Or appreciate the mental attitude of a man who could go to the ball game with a fascinating girl, yet who elects instead to gather together all the small fry of the neighborhood, marshal them on and off cars and treat the bunch to roasted chestnuts. You sigh over the melancholy avocation of the one and the seeming martyrdom of the other, but that is all you know about it. The first is keenly interested in his seemingly depressing avocation and the latter has the time of his life with the boys.

Yes, if folks stopped commiserating others and expended half the energy in just being pleasant, maybe they could win a smile from even Henrietta's phlegmatic husband.

The girl who is self-possessed can usually be induced to transfer the title.

The average man wastes a lot of energy in laughing at his own jokes.